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# BRAHMS: DOUBLE CONCERTO

IN A MINOR FOR VIOLIN AND 'CELLO OP. 102

ISAAC STERN LEONARD ROSE

VIOLIN;

'CELLO;

## BRUNO WALTER

CONDUCTING THE PHILHARMONIC-  
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK

BRAHMS: VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY HAYDN, OP. 56A -- TRAGIC OVERTURE, OP. 81

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DOUBLE CONCERTO IN A MINOR FOR VIOLIN AND 'CELLO, Op. 102

ISAAC STERN, Violin; LEONARD ROSE, 'Cello

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY HAYDN, Op. 56a

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BRUNO WALTER conducting the PHILHARMONIC-  
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORKExclusive trade mark  
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Johannes Brahms born May 7, 1833,  
in Hamburg; died April 3, 1897, in  
Vienna.

*Double Concerto* composed in 1887.

*Variations on a Theme by Haydn* com-  
posed in 1873.

*Tragic Overture* composed in 1880.

■ The *Double Concerto* was Brahms' fourth and last composition in concerto form. It was composed in 1887, in Brahms' fifty-fourth year. It was first performed in Cologne, October 18, 1887, with Brahms' friend Joachim as violinist, Hausmann as 'cellist, and Brahms conducting. The work was published the following year and Brahms presented the score to Joachim with the inscription: "To him for whom it was written."

It has been called an experiment in reviving the old Italian form of the orchestral concerto or concerto grosso in which the *concertino* of soloists is contrasted with the body of the orchestra. As Lawrence Gilman points out, the frequent use of double-stopping in both solo instruments often gives the effect of a string quartet alternating with the orchestra.

The work's nearest living relative, preceding it, was perhaps the Beethoven Triple Concerto, for piano, violin and 'cello. In modern times Bloch and Krenek, among others, have continued its use.

Brahms was not altogether happy with his experiment at some moments during its creation. Part of what he says must be discounted as stemming from his habitual attitude of self-disparagement, but beneath this there was a certain amount of sincere doubt in his mind.

He confessed to Clara Schumann, by letter, that the composition perhaps needed the attentions of "someone who understands fiddles better than I do. (Unfortunately, Joachim has given up composing.)" He continues: "It is quite a different matter writing for instruments whose character and sound

one can only incidentally imagine, than for an instrument which one knows totally—as I do the piano, and know exactly what I write and why I write it."

Clara made the indicated response, to the effect that "anyone who has written such symphonies, such sonatas for violin and for 'cello, may be said to understand the capacity of these instruments, to have discovered their hidden secrets."

■ The *Double Concerto* in the end overcame Brahms' doubts about it as well as the criticisms of those who found fault with its lack of sentimentality. However, it has not received the public exhibition that it is due as one of the major works of the master simply because it demands two consummate virtuosos who can really play together.

The work is conceived in terms of polyphonic texture, tight, close-knit and effective. The critic Hanslick described it as a product of a great constructive mind, rather than an irresistible inspiration of creative imagination and invention, but it is nevertheless not without a certain dramatic aspect which Brahms was, it would seem, virtually unable to keep from appearing in his works. Everything he wrote spoke of human stature and trial.

The *Double Concerto* is in three movements. The first is an Allegro of dramatic aspect. The slow movement is an Andante which Walter Niemann describes as "a great ballade, steeped in the rich, mysterious tone of a northern evening atmosphere." The finale, marked Vivace non troppo, is a humorous and merry rondo with Hungarian sauce.

■ To Haydn's first period of maturity as a composer, 1780-89, belong six *Feldpartiten*, written for military band. Some of the slow movements have titles, recalling the French suites of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The one in B-flat major was shown to Brahms in 1870 by Pohl, Haydn's biographer. Brahms is reported to have imme-

diately copied out the second movement, based on an old Austrian pilgrim's song "Chorale St. Antonii." It is this theme that Brahms used in his *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*.

This has been called the first truly symphonic work of Brahms. It was written during the summer of 1873 at Tutzing, something like thirteen years after his two serenades for small orchestra. The orchestra here is the full symphony orchestra, reinforced by the double bassoon, two horns in low B-flat, two horns in E-flat, two trumpets in B-flat, two kettledrums and triangle. Brahms apparently first wrote out the work for two pianos and then scored it for orchestra; the two versions share the same opus number.

The theme is a mixture of five and four-bar phrases, an aspect that probably appealed to Brahms from the start. His statement of the theme echoes Haydn's own scoring, featuring wind instruments in the melody. For each variation, one feature or aspect of the original theme is picked out for exploration and development. The first variation picks up the last five B-flats and over these weaves ornamental patterns. The second takes the first three notes of the theme and makes them stand alone.

With each new variation the emotional feeling and general sound of the music changes. The third variation is recognizable as a version of the first theme in its entirety but the rhythm is now regular and the musical sentences long and sighing. The fourth seems to be a minor melody built on the four downward notes of the second and third bars of the theme. The fifth is a scherzo-like variation built mainly on the inversion of the first bar of the theme.

The sixth is clearly enough the theme again, now scored for horns and with a rollicking rhythm that reminds the listener of the hunt. The seventh is a gracious and lovely Siciliano, marked *grazioso*, in 6/8. Here the first six notes of the theme are

abandoned in favor of an arpeggio figure tapering off into dotted phrases resembling the corresponding measures in the theme. The eighth variation is a tremulous version of the theme with hushed accompaniment.

In the Finale the theme is repeated again in seventeen quasi variations, all over a fixed bass of five measures derived from the original melody and bass taken together. The eighteenth statement returns to the original theme and the Finale ends with rushing scale passages.

■ The *Tragic Overture*, like the Academic Festival Overture, was written in the summer of 1880. The title was given by Brahms with no clue to its significance in terms of any particular tragedy, and the probability is that there was none. It is in an expanded sonata form with a wealth of eloquent themes and a large number of subsidiary melodic bits. A number of the subsidiary themes are derived from figures belonging to the principal themes in somewhat the same process of melodic or rhythmic transformation we find in the *Variations*.

Notes by Charles Burr

\* \* \*

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DOUBLE CONCERTO IN A MINOR  
FOR VIOLIN AND 'CELLO, Op. 102  
ISAAC STERN, Violin; LEONARD ROSE, 'Cello;  
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NONBREAKABLE  
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1. I - Allegro
2. II - Andante
3. III - Vivace non troppo

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